

# Nine Things You Didn't Know about Chanukah

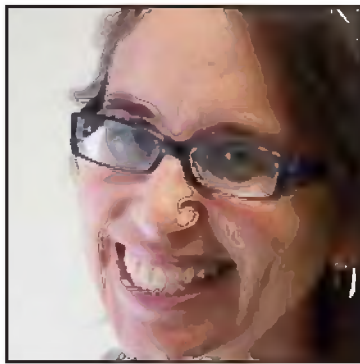
By Julie Wiener

(MyJewishLearning via JTA) - Chanukah, which starts at sundown on December 24 - Christmas eve - is among the most widely celebrated Jewish holidays in the United States. But that doesn't mean there is nothing new to learn about this eight-day festival.

From the mysterious origins of gelt to an Apocryphal beheading to Marilyn Monroe, we've compiled an item for each candle (don't forget the shamash!) on the Chanukah menorah.

**1. Gelt as we know it is a relatively new tradition — and no one knows who invented it.**

While coins — "gelt" is Yiddish for coins, or money — have been part of Chanukah observance for centuries, chocolate gelt is considerably younger. In her book "On the Chocolate Trail," Rabbi Deborah Prinz writes that "opinions differ" concerning the origins of chocolate gelt: Some credit America's Loft candy company with creating it in the 1920s, while oth-



Julie Wiener

ers suggest there were European versions earlier that inspired Israel's Elite candy company. Prinz notes, as well, that chocolate gelt resembles a European Christmas tradition of exchanging gold-covered chocolate coins "commemorating the miracles of St. Nicholas."

**2. The first Chanukah celebration was actually a delayed Sukkot observance.**

The second book of Maccabees quotes from a letter sent circa 125 BCE from the Hasmoneans, the

Maccabees' descendants, to the leaders of Egyptian Jewry describing the holiday as "the festival of Sukkot celebrated in the month of Kislev rather than Tishrei." Since the Jews were still in caves fighting as guerrillas in Tishrei, 164 BCE, they had been unable to honor the eight-day holiday of Sukkot, which required visiting the Jerusalem Temple. Hence it was postponed until after the recapture of Jerusalem and the rededication of the Temple. Many scholars believe it is this — not the Talmudic legend of the cruse of oil that lasted eight days — that explains why Chanukah is eight days long.

**3. The books of Maccabees, which tell the story of Chanukah, were not included in the Hebrew Bible — but they are in the Catholic Bible.**

There are different theories explaining why the first-century rabbis who canonized the scriptures omitted the Maccabees, ranging from the text's relative newness at the time to fears of alienating the

Roman leadership then in control of Jerusalem.

**4. Marilyn Monroe owned a music-playing Chanukah menorah (the Marilyn Monrorah?).**

When the Hollywood star converted to Judaism before marrying the Jewish playwright Arthur Miller, her future mother-in-law gave her a menorah as a conversion gift. The Chanukah lamp, which the menorah's current owner says Mrs. Miller brought back from Jerusalem, has a wind-up music box in its base that plays "Hatikvah," Israel's national anthem. The Marilyn menorah is featured in the Jewish Museum in New York City's exhibit "Becoming Jewish: Warhol's Liz and Marilyn," but sadly you cannot wind it up.

**5. The game of dreidel was inspired by a German game played at Christmastime that itself is an imitation of an English and Irish one.**

Our Eastern European game of dreidel (including the Hebrew letters nun, gimmel, hey, and shin) is

directly based on the German equivalent of the British totum game: N = Nichts = nothing; G = Ganz = all; H = Halb = half, and S = Stell ein = put in. In German, the spinning top was called a "torrel," or "trundl."

**6. Oily food (think latkes and sufganiyot) isn't Chanukah's only culinary tradition.**

Traditionally, Chanukah has included foods with cheese in recognition of Judith, whose liberal use of the salty treat facilitated a victory for the Maccabees.

**7. On Chanukah, we celebrate a grisly murder.**

The aforementioned Judith had an ulterior motive for plying the Assyrian general Holofernes with salty cheese: making him thirsty so he would drink lots of wine and pass out, enabling her to chop off his head and bring it home with her. The beheading — particularly the fact that a woman carried it out — was said to have frightened Holofernes' troops into fleeing the Maccabees.

**8. The next "Thanksgiving" (sort of), is only 55 years away.**

In 2013, the convergence of Thanksgiving and Hanukkah on November 28 inspired everything from turkey-shaped menorahs to a giant dreidel float in the Macy's Thanksgiving Parade. While experts say a full day of Chanukah won't coincide with the fourth Thursday in November for thousands of years, the first night of Chanukah will fall in time for Thanksgiving dinner (assuming you have the meal at dinnertime rather than in the afternoon) on November 27, 2070.

**9. The largest menorah in the world, according to the Guinness Book of World Records, is 32 feet high and weighs 4,000 pounds.**

The Shulchan Aruch stipulates that a menorah should be no taller than about 31 feet. Incidentally, Guinness lists at least three other Chanukah-related records: most dreidels spinning simultaneously for at least 10 seconds (734), most people simultaneously lighting menorahs (834) and largest display of lit menorahs (1,000). We'd like to know the most latkes ever eaten in one sitting. ☆

(Julie Wiener is the managing editor of MyJewishLearning.)

## we are going to

# EASTERN EUROPE

**JUNE**  
15-25, 2017

from \$3,290  
land only

from \$5,255  
air & land

STAN GREENSPON CENTER FOR  
PEACE AND SOCIAL JUSTICE  
AND THE JEWISH FEDERATION  
OF GREATER CHARLOTTE  
LED BY RABBI JUDY SCHINDLER,  
SUE WORREL AND TALLI DIPPOLD

Explore the Jewish life that was, celebrate the renewed Jewish life that is, reflect on the struggles and possibilities ahead

- ✦ Flights to and from Europe as listed in the air section of the program (Taxes and fuel charges are included and are subject to change by the Airline).
- ✦ 9 nights' accommodation at selected hotels
- ✦ 7 days of touring in a luxury, air-conditioned bus + 2 days of walking tours (Shabbat) with licensed, English speaking local tour guides
- ✦ Da'at tour educator accompanying the group from arrival to departure
- ✦ Land-only cost includes one-way flight from Berlin to Warsaw (estimated rate)
- ✦ Train ticket from Warsaw to Krakow, with separate luggage transfer
- ✦ 1 group transfer and assistance to and from the airports
- ✦ All site entrance fees and program fees as per itinerary
- ✦ Meals: daily breakfast, 2 lunches and 4 dinners
- ✦ Porterage at the hotels

TRIP INCLUDES

Search by your tour name at  
daattravel.com to view full  
trip itinerary and highlights

For more information  
contact Talli Dippold  
704.847.3427

